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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LJUBLJANA 000028

SIPDIS

EUR/RPM FOR DMITRY VOVCHUK AND KRISTIN CALSON, L/T FOR FRANK  
HOLLERAN, EUR/CE, EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/29/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [MARR](#) [HR](#) [SI](#)  
SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: UNRELATED DISPUTE DELAYS PARLIAMENTARY  
VOTE ON CROATIA'S NATO ACCESSION

REF: A. STATE 7128  
[1](#)B. LJUBLJANA 24

Classified By: CDA Brad Freden, reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

#### Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Former PM Jansa's opposition SDS party blocked a parliamentary vote on NATO membership for Croatia and Albania January 29 because of a dispute over domestic budget legislation. With parliament not scheduled to meet again in regular session until the end of February, the government plans to convene an extraordinary session the week of February 2 to deal with the budget question and NATO ratification. Success, however, will depend on the government's ability to reach a compromise with Jansa. The cabinet met January 30 and endorsed a compromise proposal, which the Prime Minister will attempt to persuade Jansa to accept on January 31, according to PM Pahor's foreign policy advisor Marko Makovec. Jansa's party is on record as supporting Croatia and Albania's NATO membership, so once the budget issue is resolved a positive vote in the National Assembly is almost assured. END SUMMARY.

#### SDS Delays Vote on Ratification Until Budget Issues Resolved

[1](#)2. (C) The dispute centers around closing out the 2007 budget accounts (from when SDS led the governing coalition). During the debate, coalition parties expressed concern about a recently-released Court of Audits report that showed some irregularities in the budget. Jozef Jerovsek, head of the parliamentary defense committee and a top SDS parliamentarian, told us that SDS members instead see it as a ploy by the coalition to pin the current budget deficit on SDS. Consequently, Jansa told the press that "the current government has to enable confirmation of the 2007 budget accounts before the ratification procedure can continue."

#### Ratification Vote Likely within 2 Weeks

[1](#)3. (C) PM Borut Pahor emphasized the government's desire to get the vote done soon, telling the press after the parliamentary session that "Slovenia's international credibility is at stake." Pavel Gantar, speaker of parliament, and Ivo Vajgl, head of the parliamentary foreign policy committee, both expressed frustration to CDA at the delay, accusing Jansa's party of hostage-taking. Nevertheless, Gantar and Vajgl were optimistic that a vote would take place within two weeks and that the accession of both countries would be approved. Jerovsek, a key member of Jansa's party, subsequently agreed with their assessment. According to foreign policy committee staffer Ursa Zore

Tavcar, parliament could separate the budget issue from ratification by calling an extraordinary session to handle the budget and continuing with ratification in normal session sometime during the week of February 2.

¶4. (C) Marko Makovec, Pahor's foreign policy advisor, told us January 30 that Pahor would speak with Jansa to try to arrange a vote on the 2007 budget question during the week of February 2. This would clear the way for a vote on ratification toward the end of the week. Makovec cautioned that careless comments from Croatian officials could make the government's job far more difficult and increase the prospect that nationalist opponents of Croatian membership could provoke a referendum (ref B). Nationalist Party leader Jelencic has indicated that he would try to pursue a referendum through a parliamentary procedure requiring 30 votes. Makovec said, however, that the government was buoyed by polls showing that a large majority of Slovenians do not favor a referendum on Croatia's NATO membership.

Prime Minister Skittish, But Determined to Find a Solution  
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¶5. (C) In a pull-aside at the end of the meeting, Makovec told CDA that the Prime Minister himself was less sanguine about Jansa's willingness to compromise, and that Pahor reiterated his request for a gesture of support from the popular (among Slovenes as well) Obama administration. CDA responded that he would convey the request to Washington, but that it was extremely unlikely that we would be able to arrange a call to or from President Obama at this early stage in the new administration. He urged Pahor to make the case

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to the Slovenian public that Croatia and Albania's membership in the Alliance was in Slovenia's long-term strategic interest, noting that the PM's continued (sic) leadership on this issue would be perceived well not just in Washington, but in all Allied capitals.

Comment  
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¶6. (C) Pahor did, in fact, lobby parliament heavily in favor of a "yes" vote on the NATO issue. He was clearly taken by surprise when Jansa's deputies refused to allow a vote, and his parliamentary floor leaders were furious. As is often the case, Pahor is looking over his shoulder at the nationalist opposition as he tries to cut a deal with Jansa, and is also anxious about factions within the coalition opposing a compromise with SDS. He is a hesitant leader to begin with, and the prospect of a referendum on Croatia frightens him almost as much as the prospect of Slovenia being blamed for bringing the NATO enlargement process to a halt. We will have a better sense next week of what kind of push Jansa or the government might need and by whom.

FREDEN